



Secretary-General's Report to the 2026 General Meeting

Dear colleagues and friends,

As we gather in Nairobi, we do so at the conclusion of one of the most significant periods of transition and renewal in the recent history of our Federation.

When members met in Panama in 2024, important concerns were raised regarding governance, accountability, transparency and organisational culture within IFSW. Members recognised that the Federation had grown considerably in size, complexity and influence over the preceding decade. New partnerships had emerged, commissions had expanded their work, regional activities had increased significantly, and expectations of the Federation had continued to grow. At the same time, questions were raised as to whether our governance structures, policies and organisational arrangements had evolved sufficiently to support this growth.

The General Meeting responded by mandating the Good Governance Review. Looking back, this decision proved both timely and necessary. The significance of this work, and the progress achieved during the reporting period, are discussed in greater detail in the President's report and the Good Governance Review report.

Shortly thereafter, the Federation entered a period of significant leadership transition in the context of the long-term illness of Secretary-General Dr Rory Truell. The Federation acknowledges and appreciates Dr Rory Truell's many years of service to the development of IFSW and wishes him well for the future.

IFSW therefore found itself undertaking a comprehensive governance review while simultaneously navigating one of the most significant organisational transitions in its recent history.

Such circumstances could easily have led to uncertainty or stagnation. Instead, the Federation continued to advance. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of the last two years has been the willingness of members, leaders, staff, commissioners and volunteers to engage constructively with difficult questions while continuing to strengthen the profession globally.

Internal Focus: Governance, Accountability and Organisational Renewal

The Good Governance Review, mandated by the 2024 General Meeting, has been one of the most significant initiatives of this reporting period. It has provided an important opportunity to reflect on governance, accountability and organisational culture within the Federation.

From the Secretariat's perspective, the review has reinforced the importance of clear procedures, transparency, institutional resilience and shared leadership. During the reporting period, the Federation adopted a Complaints Management Policy, an Employee Conduct and

Accountability Policy, and substantial revisions to the Financial Policy. These developments have strengthened organisational accountability and contributed to a stronger foundation for the future.

The review also highlighted that good governance is not a fixed destination but an ongoing process of learning, adaptation and improvement. The Federation's willingness to engage openly with these issues demonstrates its commitment to continuous organisational development.

Continuity and Learning Through Transition

The reporting period was also marked by significant change within the Secretariat.

Following the long-term illness of the Secretary-General, arrangements were established to ensure continuity of operations and support to members. Throughout this period, the Secretariat continued to support the Executive, regions, commissions and member organisations while simultaneously advancing and expanding the Federation's programme of activities.

The transition also provided an opportunity to review operational procedures, clarify organisational responsibilities and strengthen knowledge management systems. While challenging, this process strengthened institutional memory, improved documentation and reduced dependence on individual office holders.

This experience reinforced an important lesson. Strong organisations cannot depend solely on individuals. They require resilient systems, clear governance arrangements and shared leadership that enable continuity during periods of change.

Despite limited resources and significant transition, the Secretariat maintained uninterrupted support to governance structures, coordinated major international initiatives and events, strengthened internal systems and ensured continuity of services to members throughout this period.

Membership and Global Solidarity

Throughout the reporting period, the Federation continued to support member organisations, process new membership applications and strengthen relationships across all regions.

The continued engagement of member organisations demonstrates the enduring relevance of social work and the importance of a strong global federation capable of connecting local practice with international advocacy. Whether responding to humanitarian crises, supporting professional development, contributing to policy discussions or advancing social justice, member organisations remain at the heart of the Federation's work.

Throughout the period, the Federation welcomed new membership applications, supported emerging professional organisations and continued working closely with members facing challenging political, social and economic circumstances. These engagements demonstrated both the diversity of social work globally and the shared commitment of members to strengthening professional practice, human rights and social justice.

The reporting period also demonstrated the remarkable solidarity that exists within our global profession. Across regions and cultures, social workers continued to support one another, share knowledge and work collectively to address increasingly complex social challenges. At

a time when many societies face growing fragmentation and uncertainty, this spirit of solidarity remains one of the Federation's greatest strengths.

Global Engagement and Learning

Yet while much of the Federation's attention was focused on governance renewal and organisational transition, our engagement with members, regions and partners across the world continued unabated. These encounters provided opportunities not only to represent the Federation internationally but also to learn from the experiences, innovations and aspirations of social workers in diverse contexts.

In **Arnhem**, the Netherlands, engagement with social work students from multiple countries provided a powerful reminder of the energy, commitment and creativity of the next generation. Their reflections on climate change, migration, inequality, democracy and social justice revealed a generation deeply aware of the challenges ahead yet equally committed to shaping more inclusive and sustainable futures.

In **Bloemfontein**, South Africa, discussions focused on strengthening professional unity and establishing a stronger collective voice for social workers nationally. They highlighted the importance of representative and democratic structures and reinforced that participation, accountability and collective leadership are essential to effective professional organisations.

In **Pilar**, Paraguay, the International Congress of Social Work was characterised by a strong sense of optimism and commitment. Discussions explored how social work advances human rights, social justice and collective wellbeing in response to poverty, migration, climate change and inequality, demonstrating the transformative power of solidarity across generations, communities and countries.

An equally important perspective emerged during the 2025 IFSW Europe Conference in **Oslo**. Discussions on eco-social democracy, climate adaptation, disaster management, decolonising social work and education for sustainable futures reinforced the understanding that the wellbeing of people and the wellbeing of the planet are inseparable. Reflections on self-care also reminded us that sustaining our own wellbeing is essential if we are to continue supporting others effectively.



Participants sharing food and learning about Sámi Indigenous culture in Alta, Sápmi

Following the conference, we travelled north to **Alta** in Sápmi, the homeland of the Sámi people, for a post-conference gathering on Indigenous Social Work. Engaging with the history, culture and lived realities of the Sámi people offered important lessons about the continuing impacts of colonisation, the resilience of Indigenous communities and the importance of listening with humility and respect. It reminded us that social work must stand in solidarity with those whose histories, identities and knowledge systems have too often been marginalised.

This recognition continued during the International Conference in the historic city of **Vigan**, the Philippines. Focusing on intergenerational solidarity and the wellbeing of families across diverse cultures, the gathering highlighted the central role of families and communities in fostering belonging, resilience and wellbeing, while reinforcing the importance of integrated and eco-social approaches that connect people, relationships, systems and rights.



United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed addressing the Second World Summit for Social Development in Doha

The Second World Summit for Social Development in **Doha**, Qatar, represented one of the most significant international policy engagements of the reporting period. For the first time, IFSW worked alongside the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) and the International Consortium for Social Development (ICSD) as a unified civil society partnership. Through joint solutions sessions and a shared statement to the High-Level Round Table, the partnership emphasised integrated social policy, universal social protection and stronger support for the social service workforce. The Summit also brought welcome recognition of the profession's contribution to global development, with United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed affirming that social workers are at the forefront of social development. Building on a journey that began with the 1995 Copenhagen Summit and continued through the Sustainable Development Goals and the Summit of the Future, Doha demonstrated the growing influence of social work within international policy discussions.

Celebrating World Social Work Day 2026 in **Midsayap**, Philippines, provided a powerful demonstration of the profession's contribution to community wellbeing and nation-building. The resilience of communities in Mindanao and the quiet but determined work of social workers in building bridges, fostering trust and creating the conditions for peace offered a timely reminder that hope and harmony are built through relationships, participation and collective action.



Participants in the Eid al-Fitr celebration in Midsayap, Philippines

Most recently, the Seventh International Congress on Community Wellness in **Chişinău**, Moldova, explored what community wellness means in an increasingly fragmented world. It reinforced the recognition that community is not merely a place but a network of relationships, and that meaningful change often occurs quietly and locally through people working together to strengthen trust, belonging and collective wellbeing.

Across these experiences, similar themes repeatedly emerged. Social workers spoke of increasing fragmentation, declining trust, growing inequalities and uncertainty about the future. Yet they also spoke of solidarity, participation, community and hope. These conversations reinforced the conviction that social work's contribution extends far beyond service delivery. Social workers help create the conditions that enable people and communities to live together, participate meaningfully and shape shared futures.

External Focus: Strengthening Global Partnerships

Alongside these engagements, the Federation continued to strengthen its relationships with United Nations agencies, the World Health Organization and other international partners.

The reporting period saw increased engagement with international organisations and preparations for the Second World Summit for Social Development. Through these partnerships, social work perspectives increasingly contributed to discussions concerning social protection, mental health, migration, participation, community development, climate justice and sustainable development. These engagements have strengthened recognition of social work's contribution to social development and collective wellbeing while reinforcing the profession's role in addressing global challenges.

The Federation's partnerships with IASSW and ICSW continued to deepen through joint advocacy, the Global Agenda process, preparations for future global conferences and collaboration on key international policy initiatives. These partnerships remain essential in ensuring that social work contributes effectively to international debates and decision-making processes.

The work of our commissions also expanded considerably during this period. Across the areas of ethics, education, Indigenous issues and the United Nations, commissioners continued to make significant contributions to advancing social work knowledge, advocacy and professional influence internationally. Their commitment and expertise continue to strengthen the Federation's capacity to respond to emerging issues and support the development of the profession globally.

Preparing for Nairobi and Beyond

A significant amount of work during this reporting period has been devoted to preparations for the Joint World Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development in Nairobi.

The conference theme, Harambee for Sustainable Shared Futures, could not be more appropriate. The principle of pulling together in pursuit of common goals reflects much of what the Federation has experienced over the last two years.

Preparations for Nairobi have involved extensive collaboration between the host organisation, regional leadership, international partners, conference committees and numerous volunteers. The conference stands as a testament to the strength of international cooperation within the social work profession and demonstrates what can be achieved when organisations and individuals work together towards a shared purpose.

At the same time, preparations have already begun for the profession's centenary celebrations in Paris in 2028. This historic milestone will provide an opportunity not only to celebrate one hundred years of organised international social work, but also to reflect critically on our collective history and our responsibilities for the future.

Acknowledgements

The achievements of this reporting period have only been possible because of the dedication and commitment of many people.

I wish to express my appreciation to President Joachim Mumba for his leadership throughout this period of transition and renewal. As reflected in his report, the governance reforms initiated following the 2024 General Meeting have required significant commitment from the Federation's leadership and have contributed substantially to strengthening the organisation's foundations for the future.

I also wish to acknowledge the members of the Good Governance Review Working Group, whose commitment, openness and willingness to engage constructively with complex issues have contributed significantly to strengthening the Federation's foundations for the future.

I am particularly grateful to Lucia Gandolfi, Mayaka Bernard and, more recently, Lola Casal-Sanchez, whose professionalism, resilience and dedication have been invaluable during a period of significant organisational change. Their willingness to assume additional responsibilities under often challenging circumstances has played a vital role in ensuring continuity, stability and ongoing service to our members.

I am also grateful to our Global Commissioners, Hilary Weaver, Jane Shears, Priska Fleischlin and Vasiliou Ioakimidis, whose expertise, commitment and leadership have contributed significantly to advancing the Federation's work throughout this reporting period.

I also wish to thank the many volunteers, commission members, partners and member organisations whose commitment and contributions continue to strengthen the Federation and advance the profession globally.

Finally, I wish to thank our member organisations. Throughout this period, they have demonstrated that the strength of IFSW lies not in its structures alone but in the commitment of social workers around the world who continue to advance human rights, social justice and collective wellbeing under often difficult circumstances.

While it is not possible to name everyone individually, the Federation's achievements during this period are the result of countless contributions made across regions, commissions, working groups and member organisations.

Conclusion

The years 2024 to 2026 have been characterised by challenge, transition and renewal.

The Federation has undertaken significant governance reform, navigated a major leadership transition and continued to expand its global engagement. Throughout this process, members have demonstrated a willingness not only to confront challenges but also to work collectively towards solutions.

The work initiated in Panama is not yet complete. Governance renewal is a continuing journey rather than a destination. Yet the Federation enters the next period stronger, more resilient and better prepared for the future than it was two years ago.

The lessons of this period have reinforced the importance of democratic governance, transparency and collective leadership as foundations for a strong and resilient global federation.

Throughout my travels during this reporting period, I have repeatedly been reminded that the Federation's greatest strength does not lie in its policies, structures or offices. It lies in its people. It lies in the countless social workers who continue every day to strengthen communities, promote dignity and build hope in challenging circumstances.

The achievements of this reporting period belong not to any individual, office or region. They belong to the collective efforts of social workers across the world who continue to demonstrate that solidarity, participation and hope remain powerful forces for change. For that, and for the stronger Federation we leave to future generations of social workers, we can all take pride in what has been achieved together.

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